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## EDWIN M. STANTON.

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### II.

HISTORY grows more difficult as the world goes on. The art of printing, that is regarded as an aid, is its chief hinderance ; for history is putting to record popular beliefs. The daily journals photograph, through their instantaneous process, these beliefs as facts, and, while this process seems to throw a piercing glare on all events, it only confuses the mind of the impartial investigator. It is an electric light that deepens the shadows while it distorts all that it shines upon. The old style, of genius patiently delving among time-stained documents and half-forgotten facts in search of the truth, was more satisfactory ; for it made events, if not clear, at least consistent, and, while monsters of goodness and wickedness were created, the mass of facts, as recorded, harmonized with each other. We may not have got a true story, but we did receive a lesson that refined and elevated its pupils.

Through this process, the conduct and character of our great war secretary suffer unjustly. The late Senator Wilson, of Massachusetts, and the late Jeremiah S. Black, of Pennsylvania, had a fierce controversy over Stanton's conduct while a member of President Buchanan's cabinet. The one maintained that, if the other was correct in what he asserted, Stanton was a monster of duplicity and ingratitude.

Both were wrong, and, to a certain extent, both were right. Senator Wilson was a man all sentiment and of little information, while Judge Black squared all creation on certain principles, that were as narrow in their bigotry as Wilson in his beliefs. Both failed to take into account the impulsiveness of the secretary, whose feelings often ran away with his better judgment. He was bound, by his position in Buchanan's cabinet, to sustain his chief

in his charming proposition which asserted that, while a state could not secede from the Union, the government could not restrain such secession by force. Stanton saw the absurdity of an attempt to hold the turbulent Union by the rotten ground-rail of a Virginia abstraction, but he looked in wrath that ended in sickening disgust at the noisy abolitionists, who, through their hatred of the master, would scuttle and sink the ship of state. Between these conflicting feelings he gave open expression to his impatience, that Wilson seized on as information, and, after Stanton's death, claimed as evidences of sympathy.

I cannot believe that a man of Stanton's force of character and fixed opinions, was suddenly converted from a pro-slavery democrat to an abolitionist. He was not the man to be stricken down, by one blow, in his sin, and rise in his righteousness. It is my opinion that he took the place tendered him by President Lincoln, precisely as he would have accepted a retainer from a client in an important case. He saw from the beginning that the issue was to be fought out to the bitter end. He found no difficulty in making the case his own. It was his habit; and, in this instance, it came easy; for, while he loathed the anti-slavery organization, he loved the Union with the strongest pulsation of a heart that had in it truer guidance than the loftiest leader of the abolitionists had in the light of his brain.

In the same way, General McClellan hurries into print to charge Edwin M. Stanton with treachery to the man who claims to have made the secretary. This is natural and of easy solution. When the "young Napoleon" graciously consented to the selection of Stanton as secretary of war, he did so under the impression that he was to have the same sort of humble supporter Simon Cameron had been. He awakened to the fact, that it was one thing to have a sympathizing friend in a brother democrat, giving him what lawyers call street opinion on supposable cases, and quite another, to have the same man made master, with the responsibility of an empire thrown upon his shoulders.

Stanton assumed the powers of secretary with the solemn resolve to execute its duties to the best of his ability, without fear, affection or favor. He failed in many instances, as I shall show, but not in respect to McClellan. His first important move grew out of the very intimacy that is made the foundation of this charge. Stanton saw, as did Lincoln, Seward and Chase, that only half

the enemy was under arms at their front ; that the other half, far more deadly, was coiled in silence at their rear.

Lincoln was a minority President. The unknown rail-splitter of Illinois had no hold on the affections of the people he presided over. He told us once that he felt like a surveyor in the wild woods of the West, who, while looking for a corner, kept an eye over his shoulder for an Indian. The late Whigs and immediate free-soilers voting against the extension of slavery, more from the necessity of having some sort of a platform on which to rally than opposition to slavery, accepted without enthusiasm the President a minority had elected ; while the democrats at the North felt, as deeply as Stanton himself, nothing but hatred and contempt for the cause.

The firing on our flag at Sumter, that so aroused the war spirit at the North, had disconcerted and discouraged the democratic sentiment at the same North, but did not kill it. It was observed and it must be remembered, that, as the thousands wheeled into line and marched to the front, it was under cries of "Save the Union," and not to free the negro. They went out to punish and put down the miscreants who had dragged in the dust the flag of our fathers, and they gave the abolitionists the cold shoulder for being, as they believed, the real cause of all this turmoil. How long this war spirit would last was the question. Lincoln believed it would continue with his success in the field. He and his cabinet suddenly awakened to quite another fact, and that was that, while a victory seemed to arouse the rebel spirit at the North, and a demand was heard to cease fighting and negotiate with the wrong-doers for peace, a shameful defeat, that sent mourning through the households of the patriotic, seemed to arouse a spirit that not only silenced open discontent, but sent thousands on thousands of brave fellows to the field to retrieve the disaster.

It was impossible to tell how long this state of affairs would continue. Our great statesmen in control at Washington well knew that this rebellious discontent grew on delay. Hence Stanton's demand, "We will have some fighting, gentlemen."

He awakened to another startling fact, and that was that this spirit of distrust in the government had crept into the army. West Point, that teaches everything but patriotism and the art of war, had been prolific of pro-slavery democrats. Taught blind obedience to the powers that be as the essence of soldiership, and

having known no other power than a pro-slavery government, the West Pointers divided at the sound of the first gun, and while one half, acknowledging allegiance only to their States, went South, the other half, recognizing their obligations to the National government, remained faithful, and yet, with few exceptions, secretly despising the rule of abolitionists. This feeling arose from the additional fact that West Point is more of a social feature than a military school, and as reformers are not fashionable, seldom, if ever, even respectable, the cadet had a horror of the howling abolitionist.

These are unpleasant things to say now, but I am giving Stanton's views at the time, and the views shared by his eminent associates. We look back and wonder at the cold neglect awarded George H. Thomas, the most brilliant and most successful soldier of the war, but Lincoln had been taught to distrust a West Point democrat and that distrust was deepened by Thomas's Virginia birth.

"This man has no heart in the cause," said Stanton of McClellan, "he is fighting for a boundary if he fights at all ; our great difficulty is to make him fight at all."

I have not the space here to follow the young Napoleon through his fearful disasters on the James. Stanton maintained to the last hour of his life that these defeats came as much from disloyalty as incapacity. I differ from him. The same lack of capacity that brought defeat saved us from any well-defined project of treachery. The man who shrunk from a move on Richmond after Malvern Hill, had not in him the stuff to make a Catiline.

I have nothing to do with the war, save so far as the facts go to disprove the charges now made against the dead secretary. Stanton told me after he left the War Department to die, that "all the time the huge army lay coiled about Washington, a distrust of the government at Washington, as a nest of vicious abolitionists, was insidiously cultivated among the men ; and, after the terrible defeats before Richmond, when distress from sickness and disaster depressed the army, the men were taught to believe that the government had abandoned them to their cruel fate. This was so marked," continued the secretary, speaking in gasps, "that when Lincoln visited the camps a fear was had at headquarters that he would be insulted, and orders were issued to cheer the President when he appeared. Instead of holding to all that we had gained through such terrible loss of blood and money, the entire army had

to be returned to the fortifications of Washington, before Lincoln dared put another general in command. McClellan's restoration was a mistake, but it originated in the same fact. Lincoln said : 'This man may not be the best to continue as our general, but he has the confidence of the men and is the only one able to reorganize our forces after these defeats. We must bear with him a while longer.' "

I have not space to treat of this McClellan affair further than is necessary to illustrate the character of Secretary Stanton. If the democratic general had his plan of a campaign, he was as remarkable for keeping it to himself as he was cautious in putting it in operation. Nothing but repeated orders could force him to move, and the only interference he could complain of was in the directing that Washington should not be uncovered.

The true story of the late war has not been told. It probably never will be told. It is not flattering to our people, and, as I have said, unpalatable truths seldom find their way into history. All books, so far, are confined to the armed conflict, which was but one-third of the war the administration was called on to prosecute. I have referred to the disloyal feeling that fairly honeycombed with treason the Northern States. There was another third of the conflict that concerned the power at Washington that the able Seward, under Lincoln, managed with eminent ability, and that was the danger from foreign interference. Had the war powers of Europe combined, as they were disposed to do, in a recognition of the Confederacy, I would now be writing this under the Northern Republic of America. This fear was never made prominent, for it was not policy to have it known, but it hung on the horizon like a heavy cloud, with muttering thunder, that Lincoln and his cabinet were forced to see and hear.

Now, our capital was in the country of the enemy. Sandwiched between Virginia and Maryland, with treason simmering in the one and at a boil in the other, it was in continual peril. To lose that capital at any time, was to fetch on from Europe not only recognition but armed interference. The clear, capable brain of Seward saw this, and hence the order from the secretary of war that kept an army well in hand, not so much to repel the attacks of an organized force, as to keep in subjection a people whose stones and clubs would have been as much to the purpose as Lee's armed brigades of disciplined men.

I am pained to write, striving to do so with truth, that against other charges of injustice on the part of the great secretary I can make no defense. With all his eminent ability, with all his earnest, honest desire to do his duty for the government he served, he was, without exception, more subject to personal likes and dislikes, more vindictive in his gratification of the last, than any man ever called to public station. Nothing but his wonderful ability and great force of character saved him and his cause from utter wreck in this direction. Not only so, but it seemed to me that both Stanton and Seward were drunk with the lust of power. They fairly rioted in its enjoyment. While Lincoln and Chase were as pure and simple in this as children, with no such morbid desire to gratify, with no personal friends to favor, and no enemies to punish, Stanton and Seward not only reveled in despotic authority, but Stanton used the fearful power of the government to crush those he hated, as he sought through the same means to elevate those he loved.

Of the many instances memory brings to mind, the most cruel, one may indeed write infamous, was that awarded General Rosecrans. William S. Rosecrans, a brave, patriotic soldier, with brilliant qualities as a commander, and many striking defects, had wounded Stanton in a way never to be forgotten or forgiven.

"Old Rosy," as his soldiers affectionately called him, and, in so doing, gave the man in two words, did not know one man from another. In regard to character he was color blind, and, of course, did not recognize a great man when he saw him—certainly not, unless under epaulettes manufactured at West Point. He regarded Stanton as a clerk to the President, and the President as an impertinent interference in the management of the great war, which interference he regretted that the Constitution prevented removing.

I have said he had brilliant qualities as a general in command. He could plan a campaign and fight a battle equal to any officer in the United States. But in the selection of his subordinates he could not distinguish George H. Thomas from Alexander McDowell McCook, and in receiving instructions or advice from his superiors he could not see that they were apt to be wiser than he, from their having escaped what he was pleased to call a military education. In the personal intercourse first had between the secretary and the soldier occurred a mutual misunderstanding of each other that continued to the end. Nature has given to all its

creatures an instinctive knowledge of their enemies. This enmity really had its origin in ignorance, but it is doubtful whether any amount of information would have corrected the difference. Rosecrans saw before him, as I have said, a mere clerk, and instead of sweeping the floor with his new plumes, with bated breath and humble attention, as other generals were wont to do, he not only held his perpendicular with the martial bearing becoming the sashed and gold-embroidered soldier, but with a soldier's indifference to the views of a clerk and civilian on matters of war. Of course, the secretary resented such extraordinary conduct and could see no good in the shallow brigadier.

A vacancy of a major-generalship in the regular service occurring some time after Stanton assumed the duties of secretary, he issued a circular to all the generals open to such promotion, offering the position to the one achieving the first victory.

The secretary did not entertain the highest opinion of his epauletted subordinates, and did not know that he was wounding men who, whatever may be said of their military capacity or patriotism, had, through training and association, a nice sense of honor. All of these felt what Rosecrans alone had boldness enough to resent. Seizing his pen, always as fatal to himself as his sword to the enemy, he worded a rough rebuke that went home to the heart of the author of the circular. After that this brave man and efficient officer had, first, neglect, and then cruel punishment and abuse from the secretary.

When the Army of the Cumberland required a new commander after the failure of General Buell, Chase urged Rosecrans, and Lincoln called him to the place, in spite of Stanton's opposition. The secretary of war preferred Thomas, not only because he had learned to admire and believe in that greatest of all our generals, but for that he had sworn "Rosy" should never again be officer of his. I speak of what I know, for I had excited Stanton's wrath by urging the selection of Rosecrans, and I remember well the day when he entered the war department, flushed with anger, for I happened there, and said, abruptly to me, "Well, you have your choice of idiots; now look out for frightful disasters."

No army in the field called for the same patient consideration and care as that of the Cumberland. The success of our campaigning turned on a question of transportation. The enemy occupying the inner line of a circle, could, with comparative ease, concentrate on



any point selected, while to the geographical difficulties before us, were added the dishonesty of our agents furnishing supplies and the wanton improvidence of our men, who, feeling the huge government at their back, were, with all their courage and endurance, as improvident as children. We wasted in a day what would have sustained an European army for a month.

We had three armies in the field, and if my reader will turn to the map, he will see that, while one operated on the James, the other had the Mississippi. The third, Rosecrans's force, struck through the interior from Louisville, and for six hundred miles over the enemy's territory had to depend on a single line of railroad. Rosecrans had more trouble to keep open this line, and after every victory and successful turn, to accumulate supplies, than he had to whip the enemy. The two armies, right and left of him, moved on with ease, and while their generals were congratulated on their maneuvers, Rosecrans was censured for delay, although at every halt he won a victory and rebuilt his railroad. His objective point was Chattanooga, the Gibraltar of the South. Nature built the impregnable fortifications of the place, while almost impassable mountains stretched their palisades east and west for two hundred miles.

Rosecrans, after delays Stanton would not appreciate, and the people grew impatient over, penetrated these mountains, turned Bragg's flank, and forcing the Confederate to a fight on equal terms, repulsed him and fell back on Chattanooga. He had accomplished his objective point. He had won the apparently impregnable fort, from which our armies operated from that out, and his reward was, under a cloud of lies, to be dismissed in the most insulting and brutal manner. This was so evident, that Thomas, who had won our victory at Chicamauga from the very jaws of defeat, repudiated the call made on him to succeed Rosecrans, and only accepted, when forced, after he had put on record his high appreciation of his late commander.

Stanton had his defects, but he had no weaknesses. His very sins had a fierce strength in them, that helped on, instead of retarding his work. He could crush a personal enemy under the iron heel of his military power, but the men he favored, such as Hooker, Pope and Thomas, were eminently fitted for the tasks assigned them.

Stanton's was the master mind of the war. To his indomitable

will and iron nature we owe all that we accomplished in that direction. When he saw, after the battle of Gettysburg, that the Confederacy was sinking from sheer exhaustion, he crowded on men to stamp it out. He knew that Lee was leaving a highway of human bones to mark Grant's road from the Rapidan to Richmond; that we were having more killed than the Confederate generals had in command; he knew that Sherman's march on Atlanta was a succession of bloody defeats, and he said, "He can give five men to their one, and win; these victories to the rebels are disasters they cannot afford." He knew that forty thousand of our poor fellows were dying of exposure and starvation in Confederate prisons, yet when Grant wrote him that to liberate that number of healthy rebels would be the ruin of Sherman, the exchange was stopped. There was no sea of blood, no waste of treasure, to stand in the way of a restored Union and the empire of a continent.

He finished his great work, resigned his commission of office and life at the same instant, for he staggered from his Department on the arm of Death. The terrible strain that a fierce nature had actually lived on, gave way, and the relaxation meant dissolution. The silver cord did not snap; it unraveled and fell to pieces. He died in the golden glow of his greatness, and was spared that most pitiable of all spectacles, the hero who survives himself. It was a cold, stormy night, when this stormy nature sank to its last repose, and the Carnot "who organized victory" surrendered quietly to the victor of all.

As the smoke of battles and the mist of conflicting passions pass away, five grand, stern figures loom up before us, standing strange and solemn as fates raised by destiny to save our Government in its hour of peril. The monument to Lincoln has not yet been built. When it is, the column that holds aloft the form of our greatest man of that trying period, should have supporting the base, four bronze figures of Chase, Seward, Stanton and Thomas. And so will history, in the hearts of the people, group those to whom we owe our existence as a Nation.

DONN PIATT.